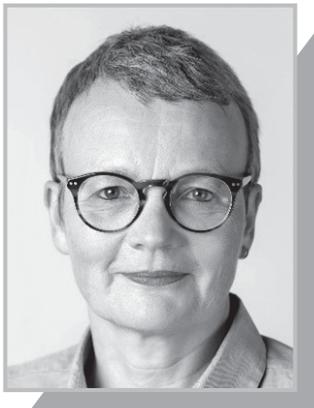


STATEMENT

Message from the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR/GFAiR)



Ms. Hildegard Lingnau
GFAR/GFAiR Executive Secretary
(video message)

Thanks to the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), a member of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR/GFAiR) that is also representing civil society in our Steering Committee, for coordinating the GFAR/ GFAiR Collective Action on land tenure and climate change, called "Mainstreaming the land rights of the rural poor in the climate discourse". GFAR/GFAiR is happy to welcome all participants in this workshop in the context of this Collective Action (CA).

We thank the local partner, Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) for organizing this event in Dhaka and the government of Bangladesh for their endorsement and participation. We also thank GLTN for bringing experiences from countries in Africa, which will surely enrich the conversation.

This CA took shape after GFAR/GFAiR convened, at the request and with the help of ANGOC, a number of members in Asia and globally to explore common interests and identify common priorities to address the issue of extreme vulnerability of landless or near landless rural poor to climate change led disasters. This was done first through a webinar and then through discussions among interested GFAR/GFAiR and ANGOC members. Discussions led to an agreement among a few key partners on a common approach to address the issue, based on increased awareness, better documentation, and inclusion of affected communities in decision-making.

This CA is potentially global but it is now taking place in the Asian region, coordinated by ANGOC in partnership with the Land Portal Foundation, ALRD in Bangladesh, and GLTN.

It is perhaps not by chance that the CA starts in Asia, as countries in the region face the greatest impact from natural disasters and are highly susceptible due to many vulnerable rural poor experiencing insecure land tenure, which reduces their ability to withstand disasters.

This conference contributes to the first two objectives of the CA: (1) create greater awareness on the importance of land tenure rights in the climate change discourse among policy makers and the general public; and, (2) clarify and stress the role of rural communities in documenting the issue and participating in policy-making. This second dimension is particularly interesting for GFAR/GFAiR as it is part of our mission to empower rural communities and give them a voice in decision-making.

I look forward to listening to the case studies that will be presented - these "views from the ground" as the event name says - and GFAR/GFAiR will be happy to disseminate the findings and recommendations emerging from this meeting.



Message from the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN)



Mr. Robert Lewis-Lettington

Chief, Land, Housing, and Shelter Section;
Secretary, Global Land Tool Network
(video message)

Land touches and shapes all of our lives, and is essential to welfare and prosperity. It is also one of the most contested of natural resources. When those characteristics are added to the prevalent disruptive trends of population growth, migration and climate change, there is no doubt that we face major challenges. We are already experiencing these challenges, and nowhere more so than in the Asia-Pacific region. However, if we do not strengthen and monitor our responses, the pressure will only grow in the next 20 to 30 years. The population in many cities and towns may still double or triple. Unfortunately, extreme weather events and slow burn climate change will likely accelerate. Land may continue to be degraded at an unsustainable rate. Perhaps most importantly, if we do not improve equity in access to and the use of land, our ability to adapt and to protect the globally recognized rights of all to an adequate standard of living and to their land-related cultural rights will be severely hindered. As is almost invariably the case, such a situation will harm those facing the greatest vulnerabilities – such as women, youth and indigenous and local communities – the most.

Despite this, as the agenda for the next two days show, clearly there is hope. The Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) was founded on the premise that technical solutions that could deliver tenure security for all in resource-poor contexts are not only possible but can be readily identified and employed at the local level. I can see that those of us who are collected here today believe the same. Pluralistic approaches to tenure, what we in GLTN think of as the continuum of land rights, provide a flexible tool that recognizes the diversity of need and land use and that promotes access by the poor. This contrasts with the rigidity and regressive nature of many conservative titling and registration systems. Similarly, a clearly stated determination to take a gender transformative approach to providing and recognizing land rights can deliver change almost immediately – not over the course of generations.

I recently visited a GLTN project where the traditional authorities changed centuries-old practices and protected the rights of women and children to the land they occupy. I spoke



with a widow who would once have been evicted but now feeds and educates her six children with the income from a thriving livestock business. We also know that the most resilient landscapes are those that are built around people, not those that exclude them. Whether it is mountainous water catchments or low-lying wetlands, history and current practice show that well-designed and managed land use systems – with the people.



Message from the Chief Guest



Mr. Muhammad Abdul Mannan

Honorable Minister, Ministry of Planning,
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

We are here to highlight the importance of land rights in the context of climate change. Globally, we are facing a crisis on climate change and we are faced with a quandary on how to help people, especially those who are destitute, cope with the effects of climate change. I see a lot of organizations gathered here today, among them ALRD whom I have known them for many years.

On behalf of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, I would like to welcome all our colleagues working in the area of land rights and climate change both foreign and local.

We are here to discuss the relationship between landlessness and vulnerability to climate change and disasters. Thus, much if the discussion will center on landlessness.

I am not going into a theoretical discussion on land tenure because we know what the reality is. Land legislation has changed over time. Historically, landlessness is a result of re-allocation of land by those in positions of power, from the ancient empires, to the British, and up to those who wield political and economic power in these modern times.

When the government promulgated the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act in 1950, it dissolved the old land laws and formulated a new land act. However, because the landlords were also in parliament, they made sure they become the main beneficiary of this Act.

Throughout the years, the Government of Bangladesh enacted many amendments to rectify the imbalances in land ownership. Most recently, laws on digitization of records were enacted to make it easy to identify land and its ownership.

We can see that the number of homeless people is increasing. These homeless people survive by working for other people as farmers and laborers for their livelihood and survival.



You as NGOs are working in bigger sphere, in that you are working for the rights of other people, especially the marginalized and the most vulnerable members of humankind.

I have recognized that in our country, we are introducing the modernization in agriculture. Initially, we had concerns that people are no longer interested to work in the agriculture sector but the introduction of modernization and technology made people interested again because they see that they can have income. They can benefit by either working in agriculture or investing in it.

Our government is very much aware of the plight of landless people and our Prime Minister (PM) is particularly concerned about women. Our PM is quite sensitive and she is very much accountable to the poor and downtrodden, so I do not have doubt that she is duty bound to do right by them.

We still have hope and with this hope we can create a joint force, which will create a bigger force so we believe that we should support our government.

As a citizen of this country, I can definitely resonate with your work because I came from a small village. I did not experience poverty firsthand but I saw it in people living around me.

We are progressing to an era of justice and our government has made tremendous progress and it would not be possible without this endeavor that you are doing.

I always appreciate conference and dialogue. As a government, we listen to the voice of the stakeholders and we respect it and we will do as much as possible to uphold it.

There is a lot of injustice in the land system, not only in Bangladesh but also in many countries. These are mostly due to rules and regulations, enacted in Parliament, with divine right from above. Land is a primary resource. Every nation has an inalienable right to land. But we have been deprived from owning land, pushed out of the land by cliques for their own gains. Thus, we have to establish a minimal notion of justice and provide opportunities for landless and marginalized farmers for them to have a better deal than what they have now.

The British made the land model here in Bangladesh from their own feudal system. However, the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act made the biggest impact in shattering that model in 1950 when we abolished the Zamindar system. However, we did not fully succeed because powerful people were still in the way. But the present government, under our PM who has led the way in reforming the land system, has digitized land registration and we now know who owns what.

This government is committed to reform, not only on land but for other sectors. I appeal to committed NGOs like ALRD to support the government so that we can continue with these reforms.

Message from the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh



Dr. Kamal Uddin Ahmed

Chairman

National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh

Relating to the topic of “Mainstreaming Land Rights in the Narrative of Climate Change”, it is undoubtedly sad that sometimes we do not understand the linkage between the two. We understand that there is poverty, so there is a link in terms of land rights. Limited or no access to land and resources is a big problem because those who are victims of this become more vulnerable more disasters.

The IPCC report said that land tenure is essential. States have an obligation to respect, protect, and promote human rights for all persons.

If I put disaster risk in proper perspective, approximately an equal number of people are exposed to cyclones to Japan and the Philippines, but these calamities would kill 17 times more in Bangladesh due to number of people settled in vulnerable areas.

This conference puts in perspective the link between land tenure and climate change because it brings together different views coming from different people from different countries.

Tenure can exacerbate the ability to combat climate change. People have nothing to say when their rights are insecure. They hesitate to invest on land and this hinders their ability to react to disasters.

In Bangladesh, if we look at tenure systems before the arrival of western colonizers, there was problem with lands. Land used to be abundant. Unfortunately, the people lost their land gradually during the colonial period. Zamindars used the land for their own ends. The people suffered mercilessly; some were tortured, even killed. Bangladesh has a bloody history of people fighting for land tenure.

In 1950, land reforms were implemented; taking back land from zamindars and given to people. But upon close inspection, ownership patterns are still not equal.

The government tried to remedy this by introducing Proclamation No. 98 in 1971, which limited the amount of land a single person can own to 100 biga. While there are still landless, there is now a limit to how much land an individual can own.

Mainstreaming land rights in talks on climate change is really important because if there is insecurity people cannot do anything. Poverty and access to land is directly linked. And in an agrarian economy such as Bangladesh, there is really a strong link because livelihood depends on land. Take away this vital source of livelihood and you not only have poverty, but a host of other issues such as economic limitations, social exclusion, migration, and disputes, among others.

Disasters are not natural, they are man-made. Believing that disasters are natural makes people fatalistic.

If there is any injustice done to anybody, that becomes a matter of human rights and people must fight for that, despite limited resources, limited infrastructure, and limited courses of action.

For the indigenous peoples, their traditional systems and are at most at risk to climate change. The ILO estimates that at least 70 percent of IPs live in and depend on forests for their survival. Thus, biodiversity and conservation, are essential in combating climate change.

Women's rights are also being neglected, which is also contributing to vulnerability.

The Human Rights Commission has been relentless in its work to protect the inalienable rights of people. It has an extensive mandate as a watchdog for human rights. We have 12 thematic committees, which include climate change and disaster risk reduction.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that land tenure rights is crucial to addressing the effects of climate change. Respecting and protecting land tenure rights is essential in climate change mitigation strategies.



Message from the Chief Guest of the Closing Session



Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury, MP

Honorable Chair, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Special Envoy of Honorable Prime Minister for Climate Change

This event draws from case studies that are very powerful and carry a big message. Plus the Declaration hopefully will spread the word of the immediate need for the world to focus its attention on this very important link.

The challenge however, is how to implement the Declaration. A change in mindset is required.

We need to look at the root causes, not just the symptoms. When we look at climate change we need to look at a system change.

A change in mindset is therefore needed. How did we respond to disasters before? We waited and then responded. This time, we need to be proactive in dealing at disasters, which is crucial in mitigation.

As for vulnerable people, we need to look at what makes them vulnerable in the first place. Once we determine and accept this, then we can reduce vulnerability.

The agreement that is not mentioned in the Declaration are the SDGs, which aspirationally say that no one has to be left behind. Unfortunately, those that are left behind are those without land rights.

Land rights is a political issue, a human rights issue, and now also a climate issue. We are now moving from global warming to global boiling. This situation is going to get worse.

So how can we make the necessary changes in governance, land rights, and forest management? I do not disagree with any of the statements, but I think where we also need to work is the greenhouse gas inventory. How can we address this as a global issue. With COP 28

coming up, how are we going to bring this up through our group? I agree that there is a lot that we have to do in Bangladesh. We need to also address the issues we have at home. A declaration is fine, but maybe we can immediately address one or two areas, low lying fruits, for quick gains. We have elections coming up, and whoever wins will listen to these issues.

Bangladesh has led the international discourse on the environment and we are in solidarity with what you wish to accomplish.

